

North Yorkshire County Council

Executive

7 February 2023

North Yorkshire Council Armed Forces Covenant Policy

Report of the Assistant Director Policy, Partnerships & Communities

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. To propose the approval of a North Yorkshire Council Armed Forces Covenant Policy.

2. Background

- 2.1. North Yorkshire was one of the first places in the UK to have an Armed Forces Covenant in place. The first signatories (including the eight councils) signed the Covenant at a ceremony at Catterick Garrison in 2011. Many other organisations have signed the Covenant since then.
- 2.2. The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise from the nation that those who serve, or have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly, respectfully, and in some cases, with special consideration.
- 2.3. The Armed Forces Act 2021 enshrines the Covenant into law, to help prevent serving armed forces personnel, military veterans and their families from being disadvantaged when accessing commercial and public services.
- 2.4. One key feature of the Act is a new statutory duty to specified persons or bodies, including councils, to have due regard to the principles of the Covenant, when exercising certain housing, education or healthcare functions (excluding social care).
- 2.5. The Secretary of State for Defence has now commenced the due regard duty and has issued statutory guidance which sets out the council's compliance when discharging these functions. A copy of the Statutory Guidance on the Armed Forces Covenant Duty is included in the background papers referenced at the end of this covering report.
- 2.6. A summary of specified bodies and functions within scope includes:

Health	Education	Housing
Specified bodies include: Local Authorities NHS England NHS Foundation Trusts NHS Trusts Integrated Care Boards	Specified bodies include: Local Authorities Governing Bodies of maintained schools Academies Non-maintained special schools	Specified bodies include: Local Authorities
Specified functions include local authority delivered health care services, including sexual	Specified functions include admissions, attainment, wellbeing, transport,	Specified functions include allocations policy for social housing, tenancy strategies, homelessness, and disabled facilities grants

health services and drug and alcohol misuse services	attendance, additional needs support, and use of Service Pupil Premium funding	
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- 2.7. Alongside local government reorganisation, the new statutory due regard duty presents a timely opportunity for North Yorkshire Council to consolidate the good work already undertaken within the county and set out the steps it will take to meet the duty going forward.
- 2.8. This is the ideal time to build on our work with partners and to re-establish a renewed collective commitment to our work with the Armed Forces community.

3. North Yorkshire Armed Forces Covenant Policy

- 3.1. Over the past few months, a project team from the eight councils has been working under the umbrella of the LGR Localities Workstream to draft a new Armed Forces Covenant Policy for the unitary council. A copy of the draft policy is included at Appendix 1.
- 3.2. The project team included expert input from the key services within scope for the new statutory duty and was chaired and sponsored by the Assistant Director (Policy, Partnerships and Communities). The work was supported by an internal engagement group, including colleagues from the county, borough and district councils, some of which had direct military experience or were part of a military family. Wider engagement with services, stakeholders and partners was also undertaken via a variety of networks, as part of the policy development process.
- 3.3. This purposefully short policy provides a vision and a framework for North Yorkshire Council and its wider partners to reset their collective commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant in North Yorkshire. The policy is underpinned by objectives that will help the new council fulfil its responsibilities under the new statutory duty.
- 3.4. One key feature of the new due-regard duty relates to the awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant in day-to-day delivery of council services, as well as the planning, resourcing and reviewing of services. To help raise awareness of the Covenant, the council has launched and is actively promoting a new, nationally developed, online learning module, available via the council's Learning Zone, as we start the process to embed awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant within our organisational structures. Further planned communications will be disseminated in due course.
- 3.5. One key feature of the new policy is to include the armed forces community as one of the factors we consider as part of the council's Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) process.
- 3.6. Research reported by the Ministry of Defence in its statutory guidance estimated that approximately two-in-five people (38%) from the armed forces community (including serving personnel, veterans and family members) had experienced some disadvantage at some time. Examples of lived disadvantage included delays in treatment and access to health care, interrupted education and delays in support for children from military families, especially for children with high needs, and a lack of knowledge and understanding of the civilian housing sector, leading to an increased risk of homelessness.
- 3.7. The transient nature of military life inevitably includes short-lived deployments in numerous places. This demand on the military family can often include movement between different local authorities, which in turn can sometimes result in having to start again or lengthy waiting times when requesting support for a particular service. Research undertaken by Shared Intelligence (2019), commissioned by a partnership of councils in North Yorkshire,

into the needs of the local Armed Forces Community highlighted challenges related to access to services, employment and the transition from military to civilian life. A recent briefing by the Local Government information Unit (LGiU, 2022) provides a further helpful summary of the needs of armed forces veterans from different countries, including the UK.

- 3.8. Other local authorities are now taking similar steps to consider the armed forces community within equality impact assessments to provide an extra safeguard on top of the new due-regard duty. Considering the significant military presence within North Yorkshire, this commitment could help mitigate the increased risk of disadvantage and potential reputational damage to the council, whilst strengthening the council's relationship with the Armed Forces Community and our military partners.

4. Financial implications

- 4.1. There are no specific financial implications at this stage.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1. There are no specific legal implications at this stage.

6. Climate change implications

- 6.1. An initial Climate Change Impact Assessment (CCIA) has been undertaken and is included at Appendix 2. The assessment showed no effect on the key environmental factors that need to be considered and a full CCIA is not relevant or needed.

7. Equalities implications

- 7.1. A full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken and is included at Appendix 3. The assessment showed no negative impacts anticipated from the implementation of work to ensure that North Yorkshire Council applies the new statutory due regard duty required under the Armed Forces Act 2021. Impacts are expected to be positive or neutral on people with protected characteristics and with those additional characteristics adopted by the council.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1. The Executive is recommended to adopt the proposed Armed Forces Covenant Policy, as set out in Appendix 1.

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25 January 2023

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Draft North Yorkshire Council Armed Forces Covenant Policy

Appendix 2: Initial Climate Change Assessment

Appendix 3: Full Equality Impact Assessment

Background papers relied upon in the preparation of this report

- Needs Profiles of Veterans Across the Globe: LGiU Briefing, Nov. 2022. [Needs profiles of veterans across the globe - LGiU](#)

- Statutory Guidance on the Armed Forces Covenant Duty, covering the United Kingdom: Ministry of Defence, Nov. 2022. [Armed Forces Covenant Duty Statutory Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/111222/armed-forces-covenant-duty-statutory-guidance.pdf)
- Meeting the needs of the Armed Forces Community in North Yorkshire: What does the evidence tell us? Shared Intelligence, Apr. 2019. nypartnerships.org.uk/covenant